

The Spark of Rebellion

A play exploring the question: when does protest for female rights become a crime?

HYSTERICAL – MEDDLER – ANTAGONIST – MORALESS – WHORE – SINFUL – ICONOCLAST – VANDAL

The Suffragettes

Christabel Pankhurst

(1880-1958)



[6]

- Daughter of Emmeline Pankhurst, British political activist and key member of the Suffragette movement.
- Trained as a lawyer but was unable to practice as a barrister due to being a woman. Instead she used her legal knowledge to highlight inequality in speeches and pamphlets.
- One of the first Suffragettes who used violence as a form of protest.
- From 1905 highlighted a campaign of civil disobedience that escalated to include arson and bombing.
- Her contribution to the emancipation of women was recognised and she became a Dame in 1936.

[1]



Our task was to create an original piece of theatre based on the module themes; Riots, Resistance and Power. At the first pitching session the two concepts that stood out for us were Pussy Riot and The Suffragettes, as they were both strong female groups which had interesting parallels. This made us ask, **when does protest for female rights become a crime? Why did women feel it necessary to break the law when protesting?** Our initial research consisted of reading contemporary articles and watching documentaries, from which we created verbatim dialogue in our script.



The Suffragettes fought for female emancipation and women's right to vote. When sent to prison for protest that was deemed illegal they wanted to be treated as political prisoners. However the state did not recognize them as that, so **they were subjected to the same conditions as common criminals**. They continued their protests whilst in prison through hunger strikes, resulting in barbaric force-feeding. Despite this form of torture the Suffragettes continued to fight and **their persistence paid off when in 1918 women were given the right to vote**.



[7]

Key quotes

*"March, march, swing you along,
Wide blows our banner, and hope is waking."* [3]

*"Loud and louder it swells,
Thunder of freedom, the voice of the Lord!"* [3]

"Women are not sinful creatures! We only want liberty!" [4]

*"Victors we stand wearing the wreath that the brave
have worn."* [3]

*"In the face of such injustice we must ask, are people
called to a cause or does the cause call to them, to the
spark of rebellion within each of us."*

*"We cannot make any orderly protest because we have
not the means whereby citizens may do such a thing. We
have not a vote, and so long as we have not a vote we
must be disorderly."* [5]

*"How did you keep faith after what they did to you?
Was it even worth it when 100 years have gone by and
generation after generation are still fighting?"*

"It was my duty no matter the repercussions."

*"The fight for freedom is an endless battle that is bigger
than life."*

*"Uproar, uprising of the oppressed masses, people who
don't agree with the politics of the current regime."* [4]



We also included naturalistic monologue and dialogue, live ensemble singing, stylised physical gestures, recorded sound and symbolic props. **Christabel Pankhurst was the first suffragette to use violence as a form of protest and so we decided to focus on her as our main suffragette.** To link Pussy Riot with Christabel we used a prison in an undefined location. We justified this through Rokem's idea that ghosts can disrupt time and space. **Nadya was our present, Christabel was a ghost from the past there to reignite the spark of rebellion in her.**

Almost one hundred years later "the spark of rebellion" was reignited by the members of Pussy Riot who found themselves fighting for the separation of Church and State in Russia, where women are not treated as equals. Under Putin's regime and the Russian Orthodox Church women are not permitted to enter certain sacred areas of the church or hold religious positions within it. **Pussy Riot deliberately performed on the altar** during their protest to mark reference to this. They continue to fight for their rights.



[4]

Pussy Riot

Nadya Tolokonnikova

(1989-present)



[4]

- Formally charged with disrupting social order by act of hooliganism, which apparently showed disrespect for society and was motivated by religious hatred or enmity on 4th June 2012.
- Served majority of two-year sentence in IK-14 women's penal colony, where she went on hunger strike on 23rd September 2013 over prison conditions and alleged threats against her life made by prison staff.
- Late September 2013 she was hospitalised after going without food for a week. She was treated in the prison medical ward.
- 23 December 2013 was released from hospital because the article "hooliganism" of the Russian Criminal Code falls under newly introduced amnesty bill.
- After release, Tolokonnikova and another member of Pussy Riot founded a penal and judicial-themed media outlet *MediaZona*.

[2]



We created a section of **immersive theatre** that joined our exhibition and performance. We took the audience on a march with us whilst singing **The March of the Women**, a song written by the Suffragettes. This set the scene and emotion that we wanted to portray and helped engage the audience immediately with our piece. We wanted to ignite the spark of rebellion in the audience and draw attention to the fact that Christabel Pankhurst had anticipated the continued fight for women's basic human rights.



Following our extensive research into the Suffragette movement and the political activists Pussy Riot, **our play offers social commentary on what women have had to fight for and are still having to fight for** to have their voices heard and rights acknowledged.

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References:
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3. Ethel Smyth, 'Words to The March of the Women', *Sandscape Publications*, (2013) <<http://www.sandscapepublications.com/intouch/marchwords.html>> [accessed: 1 December 2018].
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6. <https://www.lincolnsinn.org.uk/library-archives/archive-of-the-month/february-2018-christabel-pankhurst/> [accessed: 10 December 2018].
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